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Identical letters dated 25 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Syrian Arab Republic on the thirty-eighth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/339).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms the points made in its previous responses to reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the aforementioned Security Council resolutions.

Regrettably, the Secretariat has kept in place a framework that ignores the real causes of Syrian suffering, the deterioration in living standards and the humanitarian situation. These problems are primarily attributable to terrorism; the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people by the United States of America, the European Union and other States; and certain regional and international actors' relentless effort to prolong the crisis and obstruct efforts towards a peaceful political resolution through a Syrian-led political process which the United Nations has repeatedly endorsed. As a result, the conflict has been prolonged, and United Nations representatives have insisted on depicting the situation to global public opinion as a conflict among Syrian parties, rather than a proxy war waged by the Governments of Member States of the United Nations against the Syrian State through military interference, direct and blatant aggression, and the use of terrorism and foreign terrorist fighters.

The Syrian Government deplores the report's continuing attempt to ignore the key role played by the Syrian State and Syrian institutions. Despite enormous challenges, the latter have made great strides in providing subsistence and basic services to the Syrian people throughout the country, including regions where armed terrorist groups are operating.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic stresses that it alone is responsible for protecting Syrians and keeping them safe. It has a constitutional duty under national legislation and international law to fight the terrorism of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusrah Front and associated entities and terrorist operatives with numerous names and allegiances. Counter-terrorism efforts are crucial for restoring security and stability and improving the humanitarian situation and living conditions.

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The Syrian Government reiterates that in the course of carrying out its counter-terrorism efforts, it has complied fully with the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law regarding the protection and security of civilians and the safety of civilian service facilities, such as hospitals and schools.

The Syrian Government is committed to the cessation of hostilities agreement that entered into force on 30 December 2016, and it condemns in the strongest possible terms the non-compliance of the armed terrorist groups and their backers. These groups have continued to violate the agreement, mounting attacks in numerous locations, firing shells, committing heinous crimes and carrying out suicide operations that have killed hundreds of Syrians and wounded hundreds more.

The Government of Syria is surprised that the report, which is supposed to discuss humanitarian suffering, focuses excessively on the political process and its prospects. Meanwhile, the report ignores essential issues directly related to the Syrian humanitarian situation such as the destruction and devastation wrought by the "international coalition", which has targeted Syrian infrastructure and killing of civilians. It also ignores the fact that terrorist groups have blocked humanitarian access and besieged certain areas from within, using civilians as human shields.

The Syrian Government reiterates that the Secretariat must choose information sources in a manner befitting the ostensible professionalism, objectivity and credibility of such reports. Thus it should not rely on the so-called "open source" information preferred by the report. Such information serves merely to misrepresent the Syrian Government and whitewash the terrorist organizations and their backers. It is disgraceful that such fake sources are integral to the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. It is also disgraceful to see the celebration and promotion of bogus organizations, such as the White Helmets, that are associated with terrorist groups and Western intelligence agencies.

The Syrian Government stresses that the Secretariat must be accurate when discussing the Geneva negotiations, as the title that was agreed upon with the Special Envoy for the fourth basket is "counter-terrorism", and not the title contained in paragraph 3 of the report.

The Syrian Government reiterates that the report's description of the armed terrorist groups as the "non-State armed opposition" has no basis in law. The report's authors know full well that these groups are linked to the terrorist ISIL and Nusrah Front organizations. Their conduct in this regard distorts reality and violates United Nations resolutions on combating terrorism.

In paragraph 8 of the report, the Secretariat describes terrorist suicide attacks carried out by the Levant Liberation Organization, which has absorbed a number of terrorist groups, most notably the Nusrah Front. In the light of those facts, the Syrian Government once again calls on the Security Council to immediately add this organization and its subsidiary terrorist factions to the sanctions list of the Security Council committee established pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL and Al-Qaida and associated individuals and groups. Because the three Western permanent members of the Security Council have rejected requests for such listings, these terrorist groups have been able to grow and become a greater threat to international peace and security.

Paragraph 45 refers to an attack carried out by a "non-State armed opposition group" on an office of a national non-governmental organization operating south-east of the city of Idlib as it celebrated International Women's Day on 8 March. That incident confirms the Syrian Government's repeated warnings to the world

regarding the barbarian and inhuman ideology of the terrorist organizations, which the report insists on calling the "opposition".

The Syrian Government finds it deplorable that the report continues to promote "international coalition" operations and intentionally disregards the illegitimate nature of the coalition, which was established without the consent of the Syrian Government and without Security Council authorization. The report also ignores the loss of innocent civilian life due to such attacks and the enormous devastation and destruction to Syrian infrastructure such as dams, bridges, hospitals and schools. The attacks have also damaged the development gains made by the Syrian people and the economic resources that they need for rebuilding, most importantly oil and gas wells and the accompanying facilities and equipment.

The Syrian Government hopes that the Secretariat will carry out its duties impartially, in accordance with the Charter, by clearly and explicitly informing Member States and the international community of "international coalition" attacks and their catastrophic effects on Syrians. It must also call for the coalition States to be held accountable for the victims of their attacks. The Syrian Government has supplied adequate information on those attacks in official letters addressed to successive Presidents of the Security Council and the former Secretary-General. One of many such attacks, on the Badiyah school in the countryside in Raqqah governorate, killed more than 50 people including women and children (see S/2017/240). In another case, a number of employees and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent were killed while trying to reach and repair the Tabaqah Dam, which was at risk of collapse owing to a barbaric and unwarranted coalition air attack (see S/2017/257 and S/2017/319).

Regrettably, the Secretariat is attempting to legitimize the actions of the Turkish regime and its allied forces in Syria, even though such actions are blatant attacks on the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic and its territorial integrity. They are an egregious violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and their direct effect is to support the terrorists and prolong the crisis.

The Syrian Government rejects the references in paragraph 11 regarding government-allied militias, and stresses that Syrian Government forces cooperate with associated groups that help them to combat terrorism legally and legitimately.

The Syrian Government advises the Secretariat that the word "temporary" is no longer applicable to Turkey's closure of the Nusaybin border crossing in December 2015. The Erdoğan regime's true objective in closing this crossing is to increase the suffering of Syrian civilians in Hasakah governorate at a time while thousands of mercenaries and foreign terrorist fighters are crossing into Syria. The Syrian Government notes in this regard that it informed the Resident Coordinator that it consented to the reopening of the Nusaybin crossing provided that humanitarian assistance was brought through the crossing in coordination with the Syrian Government as represented by the Governor of Hasakah, and provided that such assistance was distributed through the relief subcommittee in Hasakah. However, the Turkish Government still refuses to respond to United Nations requests to open the border crossing, and the United Nations has not taken any serious action, in deference to the feelings of the Turkish regime.

The Government of Syria affirms that its liberation of the Khafsah region in the Aleppo countryside has done much to free area residents from terrorism and to restore the water supply to Aleppo's neighbourhoods.

The Syrian Government stresses that the United Nations must undertake humanitarian operations in Syria only in coordination with the Government of the

Syrian Arab Republic. It must not acquiesce to the demands of those parties described in the report as "local authorities" in carrying out such operations.

The Syrian Government is surprised that the authors of the report would attempt to interfere in the internal affairs related to the Syrian State's regulation of civil society organizations in accordance with its sovereign powers. Paragraph 43 expresses alarm at the Syrian Government's decision to revoke the licence of a civil society association that had broken the law. The Syrian Government asks the authors of the report to observe principles of professionalism and the rules that govern the work of United Nations staff.

Contrary to the claims contained in paragraph 31 of the report, the Syrian Government regularly approves the importation of medical supplies with inter-agency convoys, as well as requests submitted by United Nations organizations working in Syria.

The Syrian Government points out that it approved access for inter-agency aid convoys to 30 unstable regions as part of the United Nations plan for March. Five regions were excluded due to the presence of the terrorist group ISIL. However, the United Nations sent convoys to only eight regions and four towns (Fu'ah, Kafraya, Zabadani and Madaya). Aid convoys to certain areas were discontinued out of consideration for the safety and security of United Nations employees and humanitarian staff. The Syrian Government calls on the United Nations to provide funding that is real and not merely announced publicly, and that is substantial enough to finance response plans. It calls on the relevant United Nations staff to carry out their duties effectively to facilitate the convoys, adopt related measures at the appropriate time, and help the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society overcome logistic difficulties such as the scarcity of trucks and the fuel shortages caused by the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people.

The Syrian Government is troubled by the inaccurate conclusion reached by the Secretariat in paragraph 51 regarding the situation in the neighbourhood of Wa'r in Homs city. It wishes to emphasize that it did not force residents to leave. A number of armed individuals and their family members made the decision to leave for Idlib and Jarabulus, where terrorist groups were established. They refused to regularize their situation and remain in the area. This agreement did much to restore security and stability to Homs and improved living conditions and the humanitarian situation.

Civilians in the towns of Kafraya and Fu'ah were being held in a stranglehold by warring terrorist groups, which were shelling them out of pure spite and hatred. In order to alleviate their suffering and spare their lives, the only option was to remove them in accordance with the Four Towns Agreement. The United Nations has been unable to mitigate their humanitarian suffering, except in one single case. The Syrian Government emphasizes that this evacuation is a temporary measure until stability and security are restored and the residents are able to return to their homes.

The Syrian Government once again calls on the Secretariat to provide information about the damage and the economic, social, humanitarian, and medical suffering borne by the Syrian people as a result of the unilateral coercive economic measures imposed by the United States of America, the European Union and other States on the sectors that provide basic services to the Syrian people. Such measures affect the services needed for relief operations, such as medical facilities, electricity, fuel, commerce, funding and financial transfers. The Syrian Government stresses that continued and deliberate disregard of this fundamental issue could be construed as support for violations of the Charter and relevant United Nations resolutions on the part of those State Governments imposing the unilateral economic, financial and

trade measures on Syria. Such unilateral coercive measures are illegitimate and should therefore be rescinded.

The Syrian Government reiterates its previous concerns regarding the appearance of erroneous information in the report. For example:

- To date, the Syrian Government has granted approval for 26 international non-governmental organizations (and not 17, according to the report) to carry out humanitarian and relief work in Syria. Those organizations have the facilities they need for their work in accordance with the legislation and laws in force in the Syrian Arab Republic.

- In 2016, the Syrian Government granted more than 1,400 entry visas to United Nations employees. In the month of March, it approved 25 requests for entry visas (and not 10 as stated in the report) and 99 requests for residence renewals (and not 49, as stated in the report). The Syrian Government also granted hundreds of entry visas to employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross, international non-governmental organizations and other international associations.

The Syrian Government rejects the Secretariat's continual promotion of cross-border assistance, and reiterates that such assistance is ineffective, given that most of it falls into the hands of armed terrorist groups deployed in the targeted areas. The notifications sent to the Syrian Government do not meet the minimum standard of credibility with regard to figures, data, number of beneficiaries and information on the parties that receive and distribute assistance to civilian beneficiaries.

The Syrian Government reiterates that the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic cannot carry out its duty, as it has not been able to verify to date that this cross-border assistance is reaching its rightful beneficiaries. It also notes that the Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salamah and Ramtha crossings are entry points for arms and materiel being smuggled to armed terrorist groups in Syria. The Syrian Government strongly rejects the report's continued bias in favour of Turkey and Jordan when discussing the delivery of cross-border assistance. The Syrian Government reiterates that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent stands ready to monitor the delivery of humanitarian assistance to its intended recipients, but the Secretariat has in the past rejected that proposal.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its long-standing position that the crisis in Syria requires a political solution based on dialogue among Syrians under Syrian leadership without foreign intervention and without preconditions. The Syrian Government emphasizes that it is fighting terrorism in order to arrive at a political solution and to ensure that greater quantities of humanitarian supplies can reach Syrians in need. It reminds the Secretariat that the success of the political process and any significant improvement in the humanitarian situation will depend, above all, on creating a climate conducive to a serious and non-politicized international and regional commitment to fighting terrorism and on an immediate end to the unilateral coercive economic measures being imposed on the Syrian people with no legal or moral basis. The Syrian Government has played a constructive role in the success of the Astana and Geneva meetings.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic once again calls on the Security Council to prevail on the States that support and finance armed terrorist groups to refrain from so doing, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism and the financing thereof, in particular resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015). Compliance with and enforcement of those resolutions is the key to resolving the situation in

Syria and delivering unprecedented humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Permanent Representative
Ambassador